

LISTENING SESSIONS REPORT



TRUE NORTH
NEWS ALLIANCE

January 15, 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last few months, we traveled across Minnesota—from **Bemidji to Winona, Grand Rapids to the Twin Cities**—asking a fundamental question: *If you had limitless resources to improve information access and local media business models, how would you do it?* Our conversations were urgent, innovative, and deeply committed to the idea that local news is a public good.

Informing
our policy
agenda:

8

listening sessions

200+
community leaders,
media members
& other stakeholders.

over
100
one-on-ones

This brief summarizes what we heard, highlighting the universal truths, the regional nuances, and how this feedback directly informs a policy framework that can help solve significant problems for Minnesotans.

Across every table in every town, the consensus was clear: The old models are failing, but the appetite for truth and connection is stronger than ever. While the specific “pain points” varied by geography, the solutions largely converged around three pillars: **Public Funding, Shared Infrastructure, and Workforce Development.**

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

While the mission is shared, the barriers differ depending on where you live in Minnesota.

- **Greater Minnesota (Bemidji, Grand Rapids, Winona, Hutchinson):**
 - **Downsized newsrooms:** In these communities, there is a palpable sense of shrinking distribution channels and reporter layoffs. Smaller newsrooms with less resources often have to cut back the frequency of print editions and/or lack an updated website, reducing physical and digital access to news.
 - **Social Cohesion:** There was a strong emphasis on news as a “community binder.” When the local paper closes, the community’s shared identity fades with it.
 - **Basic Operations:** The feedback here focused heavily on survival basics: keeping the lights on, finding qualified people to hire, and the burden of administrative tasks for small, often family-run outlets.
- **Twin Cities Metro:**
 - **Equity and Representation:** The Metro sessions focused more on *who* gets to tell the stories. There was a strong call for dismantling gatekeepers to allow for more diverse, community-led narratives and increasing mentorship pathways.
 - **Systemic Critique:** Metro participants were more likely to propose high-level structural changes like AI regulation or citizen journalism pipelines, while rural communities focused critiques on media mergers and newspaper buyouts.
 - **Innovation vs. Survival:** Metro participants brainstormed “next-gen” ideas like app development, algorithm alternatives, and start-up needs, while rural areas focused more on operational support (admin/accounting) needs.

WHAT WE ALL AGREE ON

Despite the geographic differences, four clear themes emerged in every single session:

1. **The Business Model is Broken:** From rural publishers to metro startups, everyone agreed that reliance on traditional revenue models are shaky at best. There is a universal call for *diversified revenue streams* that include public funding, philanthropy, and tax incentives.
2. **Collaboration Over Competition:** Participants overwhelmingly prioritized *shared resources* (centralized hubs for back office tasks like HR, legal, and accounting) so journalists can focus more on providing news as a service.
3. **Trust & Literacy:** Audiences are overwhelmed. There is a desperate need for *Media Literacy and Civic Education* to help consumers distinguish between high-quality local news, noise and flat out lies.
4. **Overall Civic Health:** Access to high quality information about local government and issues of public importance are extremely valuable to keep citizens informed.

5. **Workforce Pipeline:** Everyone is worried about the sustainability of journalism as a viable career option for young people and established journalists alike. We heard repeated calls for fellowships, payroll tax credits, and better partnerships with high schools and universities to keep talent in Minnesota.



We’ve taken the hundreds of handwritten notes and conversation points from our eight sessions and mapped them directly to our Policy Framework. Here’s how your feedback is shaping the True North News Alliance’s legislative agenda:

You asked for:	What we heard:	Policy response:
A stronger workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Reporting fellowships” • “Loan forgiveness” • “Mentorship” 	WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
Public support in innovation and media literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Invest in collaborative models” • “It’s not always about access, but education” • “We need a service center” 	CIVIC INFORMATION GRANTS
Operational relief and sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Relieve the admin burden” • “Payroll credits” 	NEW REVENUE STREAMS

NEXT STEPS

The initial listening tour may be over, but the work is just beginning. Our steering committee will drive True North’s agenda this session, and we look forward to sending out the finalized agenda soon.

Our agenda is “medium neutral” and looks out long term, past just this session. We’re exploring grant programs that treat local news as essential civic infrastructure – funding not just the content, but the technology, collaborative networks and operational support needed to deliver it. We are also exploring the potential for new revenue streams based on models from other states.

Additionally, we are prioritizing state-funded opportunities to place early-career journalists in newsrooms across the state, specifically targeting coverage gaps in rural and underserved communities.

As the session progresses, we plan to partner with other media advocacy entities and cross-endorse platforms that align with our priorities. Please stay tuned for specific “Calls to Action” as we move into the legislative session, as we will need your help engaging legislators!

Thank you for lending your time and voice.



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